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ABSTRACT

In order to evaluate the treatment of death in children's literature, and to compile a bibliography of books related to this theme, four areas of a child's relation to death were explored. The first area of investigation was of concepts of death evidenced at the child's various developmental stages, as documented in numerous psychological studies. The second area studied was the various reactions to death which a child might display. The third area discussed was the cultural attitudes of present day American society toward death, with special emphasis on how these attitudes influence the child's conception of death. Lastly, a review was made of American children's literature from colonial times to the present, noting the treatment of death as a reflection of the cultural values of each era. Twenty-two books of juvenile fiction, for children up to age 12, were evaluated in terms of their treatment of death as a major theme. Most of the books were found to be of outstanding value in acquainting the young child with wholesome death concepts, were psychologically valid, and complied with accepted social attitudes toward the subject. (Author/SL)

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THE TREATMENT OF DEATH IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

BY

CAROL F. ROMERO

A REPORT SUBMITTED TO
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ABSTRACT OF MASTER'S REPORT

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The introduction of death as the theme of contemporary children's literature has raised questions of its validity and wholesomeness. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the treatment of death in children's literature, and to compile a bibliography of books related to this theme. In order to complete this study, four areas of a child's relation to death were explored.

The first area of investigation was of concepts of death evidenced at the child's various developmental stages, as documented in numerous psychological studies. Images of death revealed by the child from infancy to adolescence were detailed, with a brief outline of the more prominent concepts common to each stage of development.

The second area of study, also psychological in character, outlined the various reactions to death a child may display, exploring responses common to specific death events, as well as more general reactions.

The third area discussed the cultural attitudes of present day American society toward death, with special emphasis on how these attitudes influence the child's concepts of death. A study of death-fear, funeral practices and cultural traditions, among other topics, provided a broad view of attitudes to death found in Western society today.

The last area of investigation was a review of American children's literature from Colonial times to the present, outlining the treatment of death in the literature of the several eras, and exploring how this literature reflected the cultural attitudes of each period.

Twenty-two books of juvenile fiction were evaluated in terms of their treatment of death. The books were selected from a broad range of literature, and included picture books for the youngest readers, as well as more mature stories for the intermediate reader, up to age twelve. Only those books in which the death theme played a prominent role were used, that is, stories which dealt entirely with death as the motif, or where death strongly influenced the plot and/or the characters. These stories focused on various types of death a child may encounter, and included animal stories, as well as parent, sibling, grandparent, and child deaths. In addition, one book intended to be an information book on the biological and cultural aspects of death was evaluated, and two books designed as stimuli for parent-child discussion were reviewed.

Most of the books were found to be of outstanding value in acquainting the young child with wholesome death concepts, were psychologically valid, and avoided social attitudes deemed undesirable to the child's understanding of death. These books provided a valuable bibliography for those interested in the subject of death and the child, suggesting reading material that can be of great benefit in developing a child's attitude to death.

Submitted: December 21, 1974. Advisor, Christine Gilbert

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years society has shown an increasing awareness of the need for facing life's problems frankly and candidly. Many matters once ignored or considered to be in bad taste are now spoken of freely. Divorce, abortion, physical and mental handicaps are now familiar topics, and are dealt with openly and candidly. This trend to realism in society has inevitably been reflected in children's literature as adults have sought to share their concerns with the child. Society's current preoccupation with the subject of death has recently been reflected in children's literature, and it is that aspect of literature this report examines. Psychologists encourage free discussion of death, both to prepare the child for this reality and to help him to realize that death is simply another part of life. This study hopes to determine if contemporary children's literature succeeds in presenting valid views of death to to the child in a manner he can appreciate and understand.

A summary of children's views of death, as documented by sociological and psychological research, provides determination of death concepts literature might be expected to refute or to support. An evaluation of the social attitudes which influence literature has been made. A historical review of the treatment of death in American literature provides a study of this theme in children's literature through the years, and gives insight into the social attitudes that prompted this literature.

The relationship of current literature to authoritative research has been examined, the literature being limited to books of the preadolescent, stressing books published within the last few years, and focusing on those books in which death is the central theme. The various

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approaches to death in these books have been studied, with an evaluation of their relevancy to the child's needs, and testing their wholesomeness, appropriateness, and honesty. It was not the purpose of this report to serve as a forum of the pro's and con's of the acceptability of this literature, but rather to provide a view of what literature is available, and a judgement of its value to the child in terms of the sociological and psychological truths of our society.

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CHAPTER I

THE CHILD'S CONCEPTS OF DEATH

Definitive studies of death as understood by children have been made by several authorities during the last few decades. In order to judge the validity of the treatment of death in contemporary children's literature, it is necessary to become familiar with these studies and their results. What are the concepts of death as evidenced in this research; at what age does death-awareness begin; and how do children at various developmental levels view death?

Little research into the child's comprehension of death was carried out during the early years of psychiatry. Freud himself believed that children had little concern with or fear of death, seeing it as little more than a journey. He believed that any fears the child might reveal appeared only during the Oedipal stage of development, (ages 5 - 8), and were the product of an unresolved Oedipus complex. However, further study has not supported this theory, with thanatophobia (fear of death) evidenced as early as the third year.[1] The earliest documented research, by Paul Schilder and David Wechsler, reported in The Journal of Genetic Psychology in 1934,[2] explored the child's reactions to death. This study utilized 70 children, ranging in age from 5 to 15, who were tested through means of direct observation of play, spontaneous stories, and direct questioning. The conclusion was drawn that children deal with death realistically, in a matter-of-fact way; and although they do not want to die, rarely do they express a fear of dying. This report also established that children often see death as the result of deprivation or aggression.

Sylvia Anthony's work, described in her book The Child's Discovery of Death[3] in 1940, was the most complete study of its time.

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Anthony, working in England in 1938 - 1940 with children aged 3 - 13, tested by drawings and story completion, and used parental written accounts of any spontaneous interest in death evidenced by the child. This research demonstrated that the child passes through stages of awareness of death, ranging from complete ignorance, through definition of death in logical and biological terms, to a mature causal-logical explanation. This study also established that children do think of death, often fantasize about it, and associate it with separation and aggression.

Another pioneer clinical study, perhaps the most comprehensive and well regarded, was done by Maria Nagy, a psychologist working with 378 children, ages 3 - 10, in the 1930's in Budapest.[4] Nagy's goal, to investigate the child's theories about death, was accomplished by studying drawings and stories, and through direct conversation. Nagy's results, which saw death as the result of aggression, or as a sorrowful separation, parallel Anthony's.

Several additional studies have been made, notably those of Cousinet, Piaget, and Bochlin. These have provided excellent documentation of the child's understanding of death, and have served to expand the findings of the earlier psychologists. The interesting theories of Adah Maurer, documented in the British Journal of Medicine and Psychology in 1966[5] deal with concepts of death as revealed in the infant. A more recent study, carried out by Albert Cain and others at the University of Michigan,[6] studied the direct effects of death on children who had experienced a death in their own families.

The child's comprehension of death, as both Nagy and Anthony demonstrate, develops in broad stages of general understanding. The first stage, from infancy to roughly age 3, is a period of primitive concepts and growing awareness of death.

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INFANCY TO AGE THREE

Science still knows little about death comprehension from infancy to age 3, and although it is believed that little awareness of death is present at this stage, Gibney contends that a child is affected by death as early as age 6 months. The infant, with no grasp of conceptual thought, is immersed in finding his way in his immediate world, but his experiences prepare him for a comprehension of abstracts. Theory holds that the child, through such games as peek-a-boo (which is an Old English term meaning Alive-or-Dead), senses periods of separation and absence, and so it becomes able to distinguish between a long separation and a short one. Adah Maurer has developed a concept of the "gone-idea" of death in the infant.[8] Maurer describes how a game of peek-a-boo provides a learning experience for the infant: face covered, he enjoys the temporary separation and the thrill of disappearance, perhaps heightened by the diminished light and air, but demonstrates tremendous joy at his "reappearance". Maurer theorizes that it is in play such as this that the infant grasps the concepts of separation and return that serve as his primitive understanding of death, which he views largely in terms of separation and loss. Yudkin expands Maurer's theory, explaining that the fearful anxiety and explosive relief the child manifests demonstrate how real is the anxiety of possible loss to the infant.[9] However, the infant soon learns to tolerate separation, and by age one is able to calmly accept short periods of separation.

As the child progresses through more sophisticated learning experiences, he gradually conceives of the concept of final loss. His understanding of "All-gone" by age one marks a comprehension of complete absence. Further primitive concepts of death grow with the

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child's every-day adventures. Kastenbaum describes an 18-month old, who, finding a dead bird, tries to coax it to fly by placing it in a tree.[10] It is through experiences such as this that the child becomes aware of death, but up to age 3 he has only a casual awareness of the meaning of death. He does demonstrate some fear of death, as Wahl illustrates. Wahl states that early childhood fear of death seems to be related to the formation of guilt feelings and conceptual development, often associated with many types of stress.[11] The young child feels himself omnipotent, convinced that he is able to control his environment by his own powerful wishes. He does not seem to comprehend that an outside agent must gratify his every wish. Because he feels that his wishes, malevolent as well as benevolent, are immediately gratified, he may develop vague notions that he can precipitate disaster, even death, through these powerful wishes. Wahl states that the prayers against the fear of death (If I should die before I wake . .) and the obsessive blessings of persons at the end of the prayer, are early manifestations of a fear of death, growing out of his feelings of omnipotence.[12] Rheingold says that a child as young as age two dreams of being devoured or destroyed.[13] Thus it is clear that fear of death is present in the very young child, but the main import of death at this age is as it relates to separation and loss.

AGES THREE TO FIVE

The child age 3 to 5 is still too immature to be able to think in the abstract, and his concepts of death are consistent with this fact. At age 3 death continues to be regarded as a separation or a sleep, what Salk describes as "suddenly gone away,"[14] and often not thought to be final or inevitable. Kastenbaum comments on the child's failure to grasp the finality of death, citing as an example a child,

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who, although she knew that her uncle was dead, asked repeatedly when he would come back.[15] Rose remarks that a small child may react to the death of a parent in much the same way as to a divorce, which to him is an impermanent state, because he may see the parent again.[16]

Nagy describes several conversations with the children she studied in which the belief was expressed that life continues in the grave, the dead able to eat and breathe, aware of the goings-on in the outside world, but unable to move because of the confinements of the coffin and the burden of the dirt above him.[17] Thus the child is voicing his conviction that death is not final. Kastenbaum makes an interesting observation of an aspect of a child's life that may well reinforce this concept of a reversible death - the television cartoons. How often the cartoon character is to all logic "dead" only to be revived instantly, unscathed, ready for the next escapade.[18] The child may see death as a deprivation, a notion that tends to reinforce the idea of an impermanent death, because a child's deprivations are usually not lasting.[19]

The very young child may equate death with destruction, the result of the hostility of others, or even of a punitive God.[20] Often the child can envisage death resulting from violence more readily than from disease.[21] Sometimes death is seen as accidental, perhaps violent, as the deaths he witnesses on television. Rheingold warns that the child may not accept the idea of his own death if he sees it in terms of destruction or punishment, perhaps creating serious pathogenic responses in later years.[22]

Many other childhood encounters serve to add to the misconceptions of a young child. For instance, Wahl points out the confusion arising out of certain games. Playing Cowboys and Indians, where ev-

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everyone dies only to be resurrected for the next game, leads a child to see death as a temporary state, a banishment.[23] Most children love this "Bang, bang, you're dead!" sort of game, and the child can enjoy these games, free to feel certain that one isn't really dead. These games may well have a useful purpose, serving as a means by which the child deals with fears of death.

Often adult expressions are misleading to the child - as a "dead" battery, or "dead to the world."[24] This kind of confusion is readily understandable, but Kastenbaum feels that the child may add to his own confusion by misinterpreting facts associated with death. He relates an example of a child, who upon hearing that someone had died at a hospital, immediately decided that a hospital was a good place to stay away from.[25] Similarly, the child may overemphasize insignificant facts about death-related experiences. Kastenbaum, quoting psychologist G. Stanley Hall, mentions that the child may fixate certain accessories of death, vividly aware of the wreath or the shiny handles on the casket, yet seemingly unaware of the corpse itself.[26]

The child at this age may seek answers to the vague uncertainties about death that trouble him - the why's and how's of death, perhaps to an extent that seems callous to the adult. He might accept death as an absence of life, but cannot accept the philosophy behind this idea. He knows there is something "special" about death, but cannot say what.[27] There are many facets to the child's understanding of death at this age, but the predominant one has proved to be his notion that death is not final, but simply life in another form. He also has yet to learn that other people die, and that he will too.

AGES FIVE TO NINE

The 5 to 9 year old child shows a far greater capacity to reason

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in the abstract. His horizons have now expanded beyond himself - he sees and can accept many of life's confusions and problems. He has begun to understand the finality and universality of death, and appears to accept the fact that even those he loves will someday die. However, he seems to believe that he himself is immune to 'Mr. Death,' that he can escape 'him' by running faster or by locking him out. Regarding death as a person or as a separate being is the predominant death-related attitude at this age level. Nagy determined that death is personified in two forms: as a separate person, an evil being who carries off bad children; or as the dead itself, in the grave, having no functions or movements.[28] The image of death is as an old ugly person, often in the form of the familiar skeleton. Nagy remarks that, seeing death as a concrete thing, the child is sure he can avoid it by destroying it or somehow eluding its clutches. Associating death with the dead makes it seem remote, therefore not inevitable, but outside the child, and not universal. This personification of death, although obviously fantasy, is nevertheless more realistic than the earlier stage of complete denial.[29]

Although by this age the child is rapidly developing awareness of the world around him and is in a period of great emotional upheaval, the child seems to reveal little fear of death. He is more experienced; he is able to see the world in more adult terms, and has developed a framework within which the idea of death can be placed: death is one general principle or process among many other general principles or processes. The world is a more comprehensible and predictable place. Death can be understood in relation to 'natural law' in general; it is no longer a phantom will o' the wisp.[30] Perhaps this increased awareness makes the child more vulnerable to the trauma of death, for Oliver states that the child at this age may take longer to pass

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through the mourning stages, and psychosis may result if the child is unable to progress through each phase.[31]

The young child's ambivalent feelings about death's truths may represent his apprehensions of the emotions surrounding death, and his own ability, or lack of it, to cope with these powerful emotions. However, Kastenbaum feels that by age 10 the child has made the necessary transitions in both mental development and emotional security to accept death as final and inevitable.[32] The child is able to recognize a logical explanation of death, and can deal with it realistically. Beyond age 10 his grasp of death concepts continues to mature, as he resolves his own philosophies of life and death, a process that will continue well into adulthood.

CHAPTER II

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THE CHILD'S REACTION TO DEATH

Psychological research has established specific responses and thought processes resulting from the child's exposure to various death situations. Because these incidents comprise the plots of many of the books to be examined, it becomes necessary to summarize these responses in order to better judge the literature.

Many factors will influence the child's reactions to death, such as his age, his degree of emotional maturity, or his relationship to the deceased, but investigation has established definite patterns of probable reaction. Each reaction will not occur in every instance, of course, but the responses seem to be fairly consistent and closely resemble adult emotions, although to varying degrees of intensity.

A recent study under the guidance of Albert Cain at the University of Michigan explored the direct effects of familial deaths on the child.[33] Cain found that disturbed behaviour frequently followed a death in the family, often becoming a part of the child's personality. Many distorted ideas and misconceptions about what is involved in illness and death were detected, and a great deal of fantasy was observed. Adverse reactions to a death could continue to affect the child for as long as five years, or even longer in some cases, the greatest trauma resulting from the loss of a parent. This study supports previous findings in death-reaction research, and is important today because of its recency and thoroughness.

In order to simplify the patterns of death-responses, categories have been determined. Earl Grollman serves as the source of these descriptions, in the prologue of Explaining Death to Children.[34]

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The main categories are: Denial - The death did not occur.

Guilt - Vague ideas of somehow being responsible for the death, through angry words or jealous thoughts. Or another kind of guilt - that of survivor, asking why am I still alive and he is dead?[35]

Anger - Anger at the dead for having deserted him, or at having gone away without saying goodbye.

Hostility - The child may blame someone else for the death, as a doctor, or an angry God; or, as often happens in the death of a pet, a parent whom he considers having been negligent in guarding the safety of the pet.

There are other emotions as well. The child might express panic at the loss of love, or concern over his future security, and will seek reassurance that he will be cared for.[36] He may idealize the dead, recalling only good of him, often exaggerating the good qualities.[37] The child touched by death may become preoccupied with dead things.[38] His participation in an elaborate funeral rite for a dead animal may appear ridiculous, or even a mockery, but this is a real way for the child to work through his fears and emotions.[39]

These reactions will probably occur to some degree in any death situation, and specific losses may also present further responses. As Cain observed, the death of a parent is probably the most traumatic event a young child may experience,[40] a profound pathological experience beyond our capabilities or needs to explore in this report. However, it might be mentioned that a child, perhaps already weighted down with feelings of guilt or anger that might arise out of any death experience, now faces a complete disruption of his life, and an uncertain future.[41] It has been repeatedly determined that the greatest fear a child can have is fear of separation or desertion, and death

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frequently represents that to a child.[42] Then, too, as Hendin states, the child may resent the death of a parent because it makes him different from his peers.[43] The death of a parent can result in regression to an earlier stage of development, as the child expresses his need for protection and love.[44] Parental loss is highly significant to the child and can create life-long difficulties in human relations if not handled well.

The death of a sibling is similarly of tremendous impact on the child. Here the child may suffer both the guilt of possible blame and the guilt of survivor. Sensing his parents' loss, he might try to replace the dead one in his role in the family. He may assume the mannerisms of the deceased,[45] and if the sibling was older, he might revert to infantile behavior, seeking to prevent his own reaching of that "fatal" age at which the death occured.[46] He is reminded that he himself, a child, is not immune to death, and might wonder if he will be next.[47]

In today's society, perhaps the most common human death a child is exposed to is that of a grandparent. The child's reactions to that death will depend to a large extent on the closeness of their relationship, and probably the overriding emotion will be one of loss of companionship.

The loss of a pet, particularly one which has been a loved and loving companion, can be difficult. Because this death is often the child's first exposure to death, it is commonly felt that this can provide a fine opportunity for the introduction of the comprehension of death.[48] However, Yudkin warns that the death of a pet is unlikely to help build an understanding of the death of a real person.[49] Professional opinion does agree that the pet should not be immediately

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replaced, in the hope that the child might not know the difference, or be spared the pain of loss.[50] This can only serve to confuse the child, and too, he might feel that the prompt replacement of his dead pet is an implication that the animal was of little importance to the parents.[51] The child might also infer that loyalty can be so easily shifted and love transferred.[52]

The impacts of the deaths of others vary, and do not necessarily merit discussion in this report. However, another area of importance in the death-related research which bears on the judgement of literature is that of attitudes. Of course, it is recognized that the child absorbs his attitudes from the society in which he lives,[53] and in this regard psychologists have found many areas of potential difficulty in acquainting the child with death. Some of these, as the impact of television, were referred to earlier, but other social mores can also cause stress. Much of the difficulty arises from the adult's desire to "spare" the child pain or sorrow. Thus descriptions of death are cloaked in euphemisms that serve to complicate the issue. "God took him away." "Grandma went on a long journey." "He has gone to sleep." All of these phrases convey images which disturb and confuse the already difficult concept of death. The child who is told a loved one is gone away will surely question, perhaps angrily or with some guilt, why he went away without saying goodbye; or the child might feel that he was somehow naughty and caused the unexpected departure. Of course, the concept of "going away" might carry with it the concept of returning, in the child's mind.[54] If a child is told that God took a loved one away, can that child be expected to love and trust a God who has caused him such sadness? And on a more obtuse level, the child who associates death with punishment may wonder at the use of being good, if the "reward" is death.[55] Referring to death as a sleep has been shown to be partic-

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ularly damaging. Although this seems a natural parallel, experience has shown that this explanation of death can cause a pathological fear of sleep in the child.[56] Care must be taken also that the child understands that any death resulting from illness does not necessarily mean that all illness results in death. The child can be helped to see that the illness leading to death was beyond human power to reverse.[57] Reed suggests a wise parallel in comparing the body to a worn-out cloth that cannot be mended.[58]

Thus it is clear that the child's reactions to death, and his understanding of death, are varied and complex, and often an adult's attitudes and fears serve to cloud his grasp of death concepts even further.

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CHAPTER III

THE SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF DEATH

The child's growth in grasping the realities of death results not only from his psychological maturation, but also from the attitudes and concepts conveyed to him through cultural traditions. Literature can be expected to reflect not only the psychological realities of death, but the sociological as well. Therefore, the attitudes of contemporary Western culture toward death must be examined. What are these attitudes; what social customs have molded them; are the child's concepts of death consistent with those of general society?

The subject of death has been called the taboo of our times. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross says, "Death is viewed as taboo, discussion is regarded as morbid, and children are excluded with the presumption and pretext that it would be 'too much' for them."[60] Jeffrey Gorer expands this thought with his statement that "What a particular culture considers obscene reveals its most threatening fear. Obscenity is a social means of enforcing a taboo . . . Death is becoming the new obscenity."[61] In Victorian times society ignored the beginnings of life while waxing poetic about its termination. Today society is well schooled in the biological beginnings of life, but ignores its inevitable end. The reluctance to speak of death is clearly revealed by Lynn Caine in her book Widow. Although she and her husband enjoyed an open relationship with their children and fully intended to share with them the fact of their father's fatal illness, they found themselves completely unable to voice the words "die" or "death," or to share with the children the emotions of death. "We left them with hope . . . We were demanding that the children role play right along with us . . . Our role from now on was gallantry in the face of death."[62]

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John Lamare labels death "the great unmentionable,"[63] certainly an apt description, implying as it does not only a fear of death, but also a certain embarrassment to speak of it. Both are prominent facets of today's cultural concepts of death. Ross points out that death is a subject treated with hostility,[64] a hostility which arises not only from a fear of death itself, but also from the recognition that man is powerless to prevent it. Ross says, "Death is still a fearful frightful happening, and the fear of death is a universal fear even if we think we have mastered it on many levels."[65] It is important to realize that the fear of death the adult reveals is quite different from the death-anxiety expressed by a young child. Any fears the young child may display seem to focus on a fear of destruction or punishment, that is, the violence he associates with death. On the other hand, the adult's fears are less well defined.

Little is known about this fear of death. Psychiatry, in spite of its concern with identifying and exploring the forces that mold man's psyche, has been strangely derelict in its investigation of thanatophobia. Wahl, commenting on this glaring omission, feels that perhaps psychiatrists are as reluctant as the rest of us mortals to study "a problem which is so closely and personally indicative of the contingency of the human estate."[66] Although this comment was made several years ago and there has been and continues to be further research, his point continues to hold true today.

Theisgold contends that our anxieties about death rear sent a fear of helplessness, or a l ss of power, often carrying with it ambivalent feelings of hostility or guilt stemming from the experience of death in one's own life.[67] Wahl believes that the fear of death, in addition to being the true fear of life's end, also often embodies a host of other anxieties, such as a fear of abandonment, or

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of nurishment. [68] Some recent psychological theory suggests that some cultural mores of our times can be tied to death-related fears. A recent article in Mental Hygiene reports a contention that the use of drugs represents a psychological means of escaping death and transcending mortality. [69] Similarly, communal living is thought to be death-defying in concept, the theory being that there is "safety in numbers." [70] The inability to determine the why and how of our own death creates anxiety, because our own death will always seem premature and traumatic. [71] More basic fears of individual death are recognized: the fear of pain which often accompanies dying; concern over what may happen to the body after death; regret at seeing one's life activities and pleasures coming to an end. [72]

Man, frequently unable or unwilling to accept a concept of life in a hereafter, experiences fear of the uncertain future that awaits after death. In the past, religion and theological doctrines molded man's attitudes toward death. Religious emphasis allowed man to "regard his demise as natural and preordained." [73] The image of a heaven or a hell carried with it an implication that death was not really death, but merely life in another dimension, "a brief transition between one more important existence and another." [74] Today, however, these concepts no longer hold true for a large portion of society, and the fear of death is greater than in the past because many no longer have a belief in immortality. [75] Ross points out another change in religious philosophy which alters attitudes toward death - the promise of a heavenly reward. [76] In the past, religious tenets assured man of a reward in heaven: if he had borne his earthly trials with grace and courage man could expect to gain the eternal bliss of Paradise. However, as Ross emphasizes, "The belief has long died that suffering here on earth will be rewarded in heaven. Suffering has lost

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its meaning."[77] Death, no longer a virtue, has thus become an object of dread and fear.

At the same time, modern scientific and medical knowledge are forcing society to rethink its concepts of life, and of death itself. Drugs, improved health practices, and life-supporting machines have increased man's life span, and he has become painfully conscious of his own insignificance. Man has to acknowledge that death will prevail in the end. Here man, with all his cleverness, is powerless. He may postpone death, he may obscure its physical pains, he may rationalize it away or deny its very existence, but escape it he cannot."[78]

The view of death as an object of fear and dread does not present a complete picture of society's attitudes. A prominent psychologist, Dr. Laurette Dexler, has remarked that most human beings do not give much thought to death throughout the greater portion of their lives, although there is evidence that there may be a subconscious preoccupation with this theme, more than society has been willing to admit.[79] It can be assured that no one really wants to die, and yet many are able to face the idea of their own deaths with calmness. In fact, to some "Death may be a long-awaited friend who waits quietly, invisibly beside the bed of a dying patient to ease his pain, his loneliness, his weariness, his hopelessness."[80] Dr. Ross in her conversations with the terminally ill found that knowledge of pending death brought initial reactions of anger and denial, but as these emotions were given free expression, gradual acceptance and resignation appeared. Thus dying, though not a happy state, cannot always be an unwelcome, calamitous event. In fact, Ross found that frequently the family of the dying cared with the truth far less realistically than did the patient himself.[81]

An interesting fact that revealed itself in the various studies

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of death was that death often seems more meaningless and despairing to one whose life has been empty and unfulfilled, whereas a full rewarding life seems to prepare one for a less fearsome view of death. Death can be accepted as a fitting end to life, the proper end of the chapter. Strong religious convictions tend to temper fears of death for some, with the promise of eternal reward sufficient to diminish anxieties. Others, though not possessing a faith in immortality, can die in peace, knowing they have lived their lives to the fullest, taking comfort in the thought that their reward is an earthly one. Conversely, a strong belief in immortality can cause an undue fear of death, the threat of eternal damnation looming large in view of one's mortal shortcomings.[83]

Grief is a universal human experience. It is one of the most excruciating pains one can endure, but it is a natural pain and a healing pain.[84] Occasionally physical and emotional reactions can occur. Grief can raise feelings of fear and insecurity at an uncertain future, and it can take many forms: guilt, denial, or anger. Grief can usually relieve itself eventually in its own time, but of particular importance are instances of unresolved grief.

Psychologists believe that the suppression of grief and failure to mourn can lead to serious emotional disturbance.[85] Surely it is natural to feel sadness at a loss, but too often society denies one the right to express sorrow. The bereaved are expected to be inconspicuous and stoic in the face of loss. Tears are to be silent and private. Ross comments on the isolation of death in our cultures: People no longer die at home, but in hospitals or institutions (where, incidentally, children cannot visit).[86] We have institutionalized and depersonalized death and dying. Life expectancy has been increased,

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and improved medical practices have reduced infant mortality. Thus one no longer experiences death within one's life so frequently, and death has become an enigma, and not accepted in our culture.

Our present day funeral practices have become impersonal also. We have removed much personal participation from the funeral rites by relegating the responsibilities for burial procedures to the funeral director. This not only removes the responsibility from the family, but also eliminates an outlet for grief, an opportunity to accept and share in loss. Until fairly recently "wakes" were held in the home, with the burial service, a ritualistic formal rite, in the church. Now the funeral home generally provides the setting for these formalities. Here the corpse is beautified into the illusion of sleep,[87] then "laid to rest" in the "final resting place," an irrevocably landscaped garden completely lacking the accouterments commonly associated with burial, as tombstones or crypts. Cremation, more widely accepted today, has produced its own euphemism - there is no reference to ashes, but to "cremains."[88]

Religion plays a relatively minor role in the rites of death today. Many families now choose a secular memorial service with little religious connotation, often held in the chapel of the funeral home, many weeks after the death, and with the corpse no longer present. A recent article in Newsday[89] reports that change is taking place in the traditional Reform Judaic burial rites also: burial services, customarily held in the home, are now being held with greater frequency in the synagogue. The disappearance of other customs, such as condolence calls and the wearing of mourning clothes tends to suppress other emotional outlets. However, some worthwhile customs survive. Condolence letters and cards expressing sympathy and sincerity are welcome. Sure-sighted food and family aid during the period of loss are meaningful

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expressions of rumort still observed in the United States today. However, it is clear that many social observances of today deny the bereaved the outlet or grief a more personal participation might create.

An interesting comment upon a phenomenon of today's society that points up society's desire to avoid death-confrontation is made by Robert Fulton in his analysis of today's motion pictures.[90] Fulton remarks that motion pictures characteristically do not develop audience empathy with a character who will subsequently die. Is this an indication that the movie producers believe that the audience must be spared the trauma of loss of a loved one? Is death considered to be more potentially distressing than the violence which accompanies it? Fulton also notes that murder rarely leads to mourning but more often results in a "friend" sworn to avenge the killing. Death is only "a catalyst for other forms of action, never an emotional reality in itself."[91]

Many adults express an unrealistic view of death, refusing to accept its inevitability, facing its coming with fear, anger or grief. Sometimes death is seen as an accident, perhaps an illness to be overcome with medical research.[92] One is embarrassed to speak of death, or speaks of it in euphemisms that clearly express ambivalent feelings. Wahl warns that this inability to speak openly of death can result in much the same types of anxieties, obsessions, and neurotic symptoms that resulted from society's previous timidity about sex.[93] A bulletin from a recent convention of the American Medical Association is a fine example of the confusion surrounding death attitudes in society today.[94] The A.M.A. found itself unable to provide a precise professional definition of the word death; and although this dilemma grew largely out of legal rather than medical or moral aspects, it does

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serve to account the uncertainties society as a whole seems to feel.

Thus society reveals a great many fears and confusions about death in present day culture. Perhaps Robert Fulton best explains society's condition when he states: "Modern America with its emphasis upon youth, health, sports cars, long vacations, and longevity has come to view death as an infringement upon the right to life and upon the pursuit of happiness. And how do we cope with death? As never before we choose to disguise it and pretend the meanwhile that it is not the basic condition of all life."[95] Small wonder the child can be confused, frightened, full of unspoken fears and guilt about death, unable to grasp this "thing" society's attitudes have made such a great mystery.

However, there are some encouraging signs that civilization has begun to accept the need to deal with death more realistically. Many school, church and community organizations have offered films and study sessions on death. Some universities offer courses on death; the current "Sunrise Semester" on television features a bi-weekly lecture series on "Death." Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons established a Foundation of Thanatology, and hopefully will provide leadership to society's attempts to cope with death.[96] John Langone's book Death Is a Noun describes many facets of the current social preoccupation with death, with euthanasia, cryonics, and new medical techniques coming under scrutiny, illustrating society's concern with and attempts to deal with death and dying. A survey reported in the New York Times discovered that most people, not surprisingly, indicated they would prefer a fast death,[97] and medical leaders are showing increasing awareness of this. A recent article in Newsday reports that the medical world is taking a new look at its long standing attitude that the doctor's job is to "help or body and everybody stay alive for how-

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ever long it was possible, no matter what."[98] Attempts are being made to educate doctors to the idea that there may well be instances where the patient should be allowed to die, not kept "alive" by artificial means. This suggestion will certainly provoke much controversy, and society in the future will surely have to come to grips with this idea.

Maurenitte Bro remarks that "Not so many years ago a great many people refused to speak of life insurance in tones above a whisper,"[99] and suggests that perhaps the same type of salesmanship that helped to recondition society's ability to face this fact of death could be put to use to help condition our children to greater understanding of death. Dr. Joyce Brothers states that "honesty is best in handling this difficult task . . . Eventually all children come into some contact with death and they are less likely to get misinformation if the subject comes directly from their parents. . . Children's imaginations are very active and they can usually dream up things more frightening than the truth could ever be."[100]

However, Judith Viorst hits upon the crux of the matter when she says that she feels unable to answer a child's questions about death if she herself has not been able to face the issue squarely and establish her own philosophy about death and immortality.[101] She quotes a syllabus from New York University's course on death which states, "It is necessary and ridiculous to teach a course on death, necessary because it is an ineradicable mystery, and it is human nature to explore a mystery. But it is ridiculous for precisely the same reason - the mystery is ineradicable."[102] Perhaps the emphasis on death in one's thoughts will help to evolve personal concepts of death that will make the task of teaching the child less difficult.

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CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORY OF DEATH IN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Colonial America saw a great emphasis on concepts of life which today would be considered morbid and unwholesome. Moral judgements were severe, and man was continually admonished to guard against deviltry and ungodliness. The religious tenets of the Puritans seemed to add to the already grim existence of the early settlers. This religion chose to emphasize the Biblical view of death as a punishment visited upon mankind by a wrathful God. Man was powerless to affect his own salvation, and the promise of heaven and eternal reward seemed totally unattainable to a people warned constantly of their natural depravity. Dying held untold terrors for the hapless Puritan, and even a constant and thorough repentance was not a guarantee of deliverance from the flames of hell.[103]

This stern unbending morality was depicted relentlessly in the literature of the period, and children were not spared its grim message. The children of New England were "forced to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the morbid accounts of the long drawn out illnesses and dying speeches of numbers of children who died pious deaths at an early age."[104] Typical was James Janeway's Token for Children, Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children, printed in Philadelphia in 1749.[105] Cotton Mather, probably the best remembered theologian of the times, wrote many sermons and tracts portraying a grim death and the threat of eternal punishment awaiting those who sinned against God and man. Children, taught that they were not "Born to live, but born to dye" [sic], were provided with literature designed to teach them how to "dye" in a befitting manner.[106] Hymns, moral songs, and sermons

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all conveyed this message.

The object of this literature was the same as in any era - to teach those ideals and standards which society wished to impress upon its children. The intellectual world of Colonial times was in the hands of the Puritan clergy, so it is not surprising that so much of the literature was of a religious bias. These gloomy tenets of Puritanism made pleasure a sin, and as librarian-author Ruth Hill Viguers observed, tongue-in-cheek, "With their time spent brooding death and eternal punishment . . . early death must have seemed, if not joyful, at least a blessed release."[107]

It is easy to ridicule the literature of the Puritan fathers, but it must be remembered that death was a common experience in that era. "The death of a newborn baby was an accepted hazard of childbirth, and the survival of a child beyond the first few years of life was regarded as something of a phenomenon."[108] This created in society a need to help parents and children deal with this fact of life, so it seems only natural that the literature of the day should reflect this concern. Cornelia Meigs sums it up thus:

> The idea of early death and the necessity of preparing for it was a theme that was never laid to rest. One can deplore the blindness of parents who put such weight upon it, but one must see their pathetic necessity. It was not the idea that the good die young, which they wished to keep always in mind, but the tragic fact that in that age the chance of life for young children was cruelly small and that parents must teach their children to be ready for death among the first things that they must know.[109]

Viguers adds that this kind of reading at least reassured the adult, though it may have cheated the child.[110]

Not all the literature of the day was grim Puritan sermonizing, however. Chapbooks, and later books from the press of John Newbery provided a welcome relief. Although Newbery's publications followed the

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theory that books had to teach, the lessons of his stories were less distressing and profound, serving to emphasize standards of conduct more than morality. Some of these publications even included puzzles and games. Newbery's contribution to the development of children's literature as good entertainment is proved by the fact that many of his publications became classics and are still enjoyed today. Perhaps the best loved and remembered was The Renowned History of Little Goody-Two-Shoes. This book was not entirely free of moral preaching, though it was certainly far less morbid and depressing than earlier fare. Goody admonished children to prepare for death: "Conduct yourselves as if that day were to be your last, and lie down at night as if you never expected to see this world anymore."[111] She lightened the burden somewhat by suggesting that this could be done with 'chearfulness' [sic] because death was not to be considered evil, but a "Convenience, as a useful Pilot, who is to convey you to a place of greater happiness."[112] Goody's attitudes toward death were certainly more palatable than the Puritan traditions, and set the tone for the changing times.

The McGuffey Readers of the early 1800's served to promote society's views through children's literature, much of it in the form of poetry. In this literature can be seen the growing trend to the sentimental death that was in vogue during the latter half of the 19th century. Lesson XXXIII of the Fourth Reader, published in 1836, contained a poem called "What Is Death?", in which the death of an infant is compared to the emergence of a moth from a chrysalis:

> How beautiful will brother be
> When God shall give him wings,
> Above this dying world to flee,
> And live with heavenly things. [113]

By the middle of the 19th century society's obsession with the

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terrors of death and rigid morality was eroded. A new era of well-being and complacency appeared, and cultural pursuits of a more secular nature occupied the nation, as immigration and industry expanded America's horizons. The unbending pious teachings of the Puritan religion were tempered by a theological rationalization more consistent with the theory that death was a peaceful outlet from sin and man's misery.[114] Literature reflected this change in more placid, less morbid topics. Now the standards impressed upon society through its books were the prudish ideals of the Victorian era. Children's literature had liberal doses of tragedy, accident, illness and death. The literary style of such authors as Charlotte Yonge and Julia Ewing seems flowery and belabored by today's standards, but they were popular writers in their day. MarthaFinley's Elsie Dinsmore series in the 1870's was representative of the period, presenting idyllic family life, full of adventure and romance, teaching the virtues of hard work and self-discipline. Leslie Fiedler states that death in literature became a big selling point, with great interest in the "ambiguous pleasure of standing over the snow white death bed of the virgin child."[115] Eva's death in Uncle Tom's Cabin is a marvelous illustration of this type of prose, which Fiedler calls "an orgy of aproved pathos."[116]

> A spasm of mortal agony passed over the face - she struggled for breath, and threw up her little hands . . . The child lay panting on her pillows, as one exhausted - the large clear eyes rolled up and fixed. Ah, what said those eyes, that spoke so much of heaven? Earth was past, and earthly pain; but so solemn, so mysterious, was the triumphant brightness of that face, that it checked even the sobs of sorrow . . . A bright glorious smile passed over her face, and she said brokenly, "O! love, - joy, - peace!" gave one sigh, and passed from death unto life.[117]

An outstanding exception to this florid style of writing was Louisa May Alcott. She revealed a fine understanding of human nature

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far beyond that of other writers of the times. The March family in Little Women reacted in what is recognized today as a most natural way to the knowledge of Beth's approaching death, with sadness, but with a desire to make "that last year a happy one."[118] Beth's concern at death was a regret that she had done so little with her life, and she expressed sorrow at leaving her family. There was no terror of dying, no anxious death-bed travail. In fact, Alcott refuted the sentimentality of her day: "Seldom except in books, do the dying utter memorable words, see visions, or depart with beatified countenances; and those who have sped many parting souls know that to most the end comes as naturally and simply as sleep."[119] Beth's "tide went out easily,"[120] and the description of her death is restrained and simple, and reads well, even today.

Alcott's literature proved very popular, and served as the forerunner of that class of literature that came to be known as realism. This term, however, does not define the literature of actuality which is called realism today, but rather referred to that literature in which the portraits of the characters were true to life. Literary standards of the day were raised by Alcott's writings, and further enhanced by the works of Howard Pyle, during the latter half of the 19th century. Pyle's themes and elements of style combined traditional writing with a more innovative approach, and helped bring about a change in literary style from the florid prose of the Victorian era to the more simple writing of today. Viguers remarks that the literature of the 20th century had its roots in the 19th.[121]

Many excellent children's books appeared during the 20th century, inspired by concerned educators and librarians, and assisted by improved printing techniques, expansion of library systems, and the organization of publications that promoted excellence in literature.[122]

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The literature of the early 1900's reflected the cultural interests of the country: growing scientific knowledge, a shrinking world, and hopes for lasting world peace. Vast changes in educational methods, with emphasis on individual learning and independent reading, created a demand for books covering a wide range of subjects and many levels of difficulty.[123] There was little attempt to instruct or enlighten through children's fiction, and the non-curriculum related literature of the first half of this century was largely animal and adventure stories. While the sentimental deaths of the previous era had disappeared, this literature tended to ignore death completely.

Robert Downs, in stating that a book is the product of its times, comments that some works might not have appeared at all in another era, or would probably have attracted little attention.[124] This seems to be the case with the realism of today. The changed attitudes toward children, toward the process of growing up, and toward the purpose of reading have made possible new approaches to writing for boys and girls. Children are treated with respect in their literature, neither "talked at" nor "talked down to." Forces within them are to be stimulated through imaginative presentation of experience, and not through preachment or moralizing.[125] These concepts have paved the way for the trend to literature of actuality which is called the realism of today. Society expressed a need for such literature, and it has been generally accepted. Cornelia Meigs has stated that children's literature provides "not only a continuous record of childhood, but a continuous record of society as a whole, and - what is more important - the ideals and standards that society wished to inculcate into each new generation."[126] It would seem that this realistic literature mirrors cultural preferences for truth and clarity in dealing with children.

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The introduction of this realism into children's literature has not been without controversy. Some literature has offered, "in the name of 'reality', sheer ugliness and evil, unrelieved by any resolution."[127] But very good books where the problems are real have been generally welcomed, by adult and child alike. Jean Karl, editor of the Children's Book Department of Atheneum Publishers, claims that much of the realism in a child's book is meant to drive home currently acceptable viewpoints, and she welcomes realism, saying, "This is a time of change, and change does make it possible for new attitudes to arise. . Almost no theme is unacceptable in a child's book today if it is truly written within a child's understanding. What is most lacking is not breadth of subject, but breadth of viewpoint."[128] Librarian Lillian Smith feels this literature can offer a child the chance to gain enhancement of his own life.[129] Author-editor Nancy Larrick defends the literature of realism, claiming that these books contain the violence of the social revolution of our times, and that one must be ready to help the child explore these books.[130] Josette Frank, of the Child Study Association, states it succinctly: "Sunshine is certainly appropriate in children's books . . . Nevertheless, occasional clouds and rain, even storms, are just as necessary, and just as inevitably a part of life. Along with their happy books, children also need some sterner stuff."[131]

The realism with which this report is concerned is perhaps the most "stern stuff" a child will encounter - death. As society has become aware of the need to speak openly of this topic, many books with death-related themes have appeared. Death was first introduced into adolescent literature during the mid-1960's, and gradually books designed for the younger reader have been published, in picture book form as well as in longer stories for the intermediate age child.

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This literature has provoked much discussion. One typical viewpoint is expressed by librarian-educator Evelyn Swenson. Swenson questions whether our society's ignoring of death is any healthier than earlier society's obsession with it. Neither approach, she feels, is mature, nor provides guidelines for the child's development. Swenson is generally supportive of this literature, pointing out that, while little is known about the wisest way of presenting death to the child, the careful honest approach would seem to be most helpful.[132] Another attitude is voiced by Barbara Morris, who questions the merit and appropriateness of so much reality, feeling it is difficult to handle in a teaching situation. Morris suggests that perhaps familiarization with death would be best left to parents, and if it must be taught at all in a classroom, should be done in a cognitive fashion, relying on the biological approach, such as in Herbert Zim's book, Life and Death.[133]

Eulalie Steinmetz Ross, writing in Explaining Death to Children, shrugged off the need for literature dealing with death for the young child. She looked upon the role of children's literature as a means of providing a security blanket, offering love and tenderness as a support in times of emotional stress. "In the picture books for the smallest child there are no intimations of immortality. The child is so recently of the quick that there is little need in his spring-green world for an understanding of the dead . . . The warmth and beauty and tenderness of such picture books help crystallize the child's sense of security in his real world. Then older he is sustained in emotional crises by this sense of security; it enables him to endure whatever may befall him with greater stability."[134] Perhaps this is simply an apology for the lack of more realistic literature at the time this was

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written, and certainly this attitude has been contradicted by the research of those psychologists who have studied children and their needs concerning death. One can hope that the introduction of more realistic literature can meet this need.

Children's books dealing with death can be difficult to choose and to suggest to a child, not necessarily or entirely out of one's own squeamishness at the subject itself, but out of a very real appreciation of the impact such material can have on a sensitive child. These death-related books must meet the criteria expected of any good literature: integrity, appropriateness, and quality of writing, as described by Josette Frank in Your Child's Reading Today.[135] But in addition, it is clear that a book of this nature must have a very high degree of art and integrity, and it must reflect the psychological attitudes of the times, in a wholesome honest fashion. Any sociological values the book expresses must be an honest portrayal of cultural truths. The literature must support the child's concepts of death, and his reactions to it. It must present the story with sensitivity, not sentimentality, and must enable the reader to share in the human emotions occuring in the story. With these criteria, it is hoped that the book will be helpful to a child as preparatory material or as supportive aid, and will be valuable to the professional concerned with children and death.

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CHAPTER V

EVALUATION OF THE BOOKS

The books selected for review in this report have been culled from extensive examination of bibliographies from various sources. The books are not reviewed in the manner of an evaluative book review, but it is an obvious premise that developmental values are most readily communicated in those stories that provide enjoyable reading experiences. Therefore, it can be assured that the books meet the criteria demanded of a "good book" - appropriateness, integrity, and wholesomeness. The aim of this report has not been to merely tabulate the numbers of books in which a death occurs, but rather to examine only those books in which the death is an integral part of the story, having a profound effect on the plot and/or the characters. Many books introduce a death sequence, but it is often merely a part of the plot, and does not provide much impact on the general story line or the hero, or on the reader. These books were eliminated, often with reluctance because of their high literary value, or because they had a moral which might be desirable to stress. This report, then, concentrates on those books having a strong death-theme, either as the foundation of the plot, or as an important continuing element of the story line.

The report reviews the variety of ways in which death is introduced, and examines the variety of reactions the characters display to the death, attempting to judge the literature in terms of the psychological and cultural standards presented earlier in the report. Several criteria of value were explored:

1. Is the death sequence a part of the plot in which cause and effect are easily recognized?

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2. Are the cause and effect elements presented honestly, not overly sentimental, or morbid?

3. Is any violence felt to be necessary and true to the plot, or does it seem to exist for its own sake?

4. Is the book free from moralizing? Is any undue stress placed upon ideological viewpoints, such as comment on belief in a hereafter, or overly propagandic religious views?

The titles are arranged alphabetically, and an indication of suggested age level is given. A separate section lists three excellent books recommended for adult use, as stimulation to conversations about death, with guidelines for use.

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Abbott, Sarah. The Old Dog. New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1972. Ages 3 - 7.

One morning Ben wakes and finds his lifelong companion the old dog does not wake up and move. Father gently explains that the dog is dead. Ben reacts with sadness, and finds many ways in which his daily routine suffers from the loss of his pet. Ben reminisces about the many happy times he has spent with his beloved companion.

The description of the dog's death is simple and natural, the concept being that "It isn't bad to die . . . .To die is to lie there as though you're sleeping." However, the book does not allow the idea of death as sleep to remain, and the boy comes to realize that death also means that someone isn't there anymore. Psychologically, this is wise, as psychologists do emphasize the dangers inherent in attaching a sleep concept to the idea of death. The boy's reactions to death are perfectly natural, and well stated.

The only criticism of this otherwise lovely book is the ending, in which the parents immediately bring home a new dog. No attempt is made to analyze the boy's reactions, but those authorities who have dealt with this matter are unanimously opposed to this step. Dr. Sinott explains their objection with the contention that a child may be led to conclude that the loss of a loved one is of no great importance, or that love may be easily transferred and loyalty easily shifted. Rabbi Grollman remarks that the child might question if his passing would also go unnoticed. Their recommendations for a better way of handling a pet loss would be to help the child pass through a normal period of mourning and grief, with frank discussion about feelings and facts, but to delay the purchase of a new pet until the child expresses such a desire.

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Barnwell, Robinson. Head Into the Wind. New York: David McKay, Co., Inc., 1965. Ages 10 - 14.

When he is fourteen and his father dies, Toby is sure his mother's love for his father will prevent her from marrying again. Toby's reactions to his father's death are intertwined throughout this lovely sensitive story.

Toby felt that his father's death was not fair, when he had expected to go on living for a long time. As time passed and Toby continued to miss his father, he began to feel that no one else mourned him. He sometimes felt that his father's death was God's punishment. Then, as he is able to begin to accept the death and feel that his father was with God and had not forgotten him, Toby is able to accept the idea of his mother's remarriage.

This book is a story of a boy's adolescence, with his need for the love of his father and the security of his home bringing him the hurts of youth. The boy's painful coping with grief and his failure to understand his mother's desire to remarry are all well expressed, and his final maturity in accepting the shifting fortunes of his life is a satisfying conclusion.

Although the book tells a sensitive story, is well written and good reading, one questions whether the boy's reactions and concepts of death are consistent with his age. Somehow, one feels that a boy of this age would have a more mature acceptance of death, and be able to realize his mother's need for continuing love and security. Psychologically, a fourteen-year-old child usually has an understanding of death equal to the adult's, and this book fails to portray that fact.

Brooks, Jerome. Uncle Mike's Boy. New York: Harper and Row, 1973. Ages 10 - 12.

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Pudge's sister is killed in an accident, and Pudge feels he is to blame, convinced he was not watchful enough. He gets no support from his parents, involved in their own troubles, and turns to Uncle Mike for solace.

In addition to Pudges's feelings of guilt, many other reactions to his sister's death are described. Pudge feels frightened and confused. He wishes he was the one to die. He expresses wonder at how it must feel to be dead, and shows disgust at the notion that the body will return to the earth. These are all psychologically true representations, typical of this age and valuable to discuss.

The description of the accident in which Pudge's sister lost her life is vivid, and makes no effort to lessen the gore and Pudge's fright and confusion. The description of the funeral is very good, an accurate view of this aspect of death. The book demonstrates a very real grasp of life's problems. Many other troubles enter into the story, but the death provides the thread that ties the story together. This book is excellent reading with strong characterization and great human interest.

Brown, Margaret Wise. The Dead Bird. Reading, Mass.: Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., 1965. Ages 5 - 8.

The Dead Bird is a beautiful introduction to death, presented in a context with which a child can readily identify. The children find a bird, and after some prodding and discussion realize it is dead. They express regret that the little bird will never fly again, and decide to bury it. The burial ritual is carried out with solemnity, tears, and singing. The children resolve to visit the grave every day and remember the bird. And they did - "until they forgot."

The presentation is excellent, the young children's curiosity

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and response to death true psychologically. The brief biological description of death is tasteful and simple. The children accept the sadness of loss of life, and express this through the elaborate burial rites. Participation in the burial rite reflects the children's awareness of adult mourning tradition and is a satisfactory and accurate interpretation of this ritual. Psychologists view this as a desirable reaction to death and as a healthy vent for grief. Use of the phrase "until they forgot" at the end of the story seems particularly valuable, reminding and assuring the child that open grief and mourning need not and should not be experienced forever.

Buck, Pearl S. The Big Wave. New York: The John Day Co., 1947. Ages 8 - 12.

This is a masterful tale of Jiva, a young Japanese boy who learns that life is stronger that death. Death comes to a small fishing village in the form of a tidal wave that washes away most of the villagers, leaving Jiva orphaned. Jiva tries to accept the perils of life without fear, as his father had taught him, but when death takes his parents he is grief-stricken. The family that befriends him understands the need for his grief, and allows him to mourn at will, silently offering him encouragement and the support of their love.

The boy's intense reactions to his parents' deaths is natural and healthy. The friends' understanding of his need to mourn teaches a valuable lesson. The story expresses in beautiful terms the Japanese philosophy of life and death: To live in the presence of death makes us brave and strong . . . We do not fear death because we understand that life and death are necessary to each other. Fear of death is overcome by total acceptance of its inevitability. These are the messages of the book, couched in a sensitive tale which provides the young reader with valuable morals about life and death.

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Burch, Robert. Simon and the Game of Chance. New York: The Viking Press, 1970. Ages 10 - 12.

Simon's family is happy when the mother gives birth to a long-awaited baby girl, but when the baby dies, mother sinks into depression and must be hospitalized. Tragedy strikes again when Simon's sister's fiance Whit is killed in a freak accident on their wedding day. Simon feels guilty, because he, dreading to lose the security of his sister's care, has wished that "something" would happen so that she would not leave the family. Finally, after several months Simon is able to express his guilt to his sister, who assures him that neither he nor anyone else is in any way responsible for Whit's death.

The tragedy of Whit's death is dealt with in simple terms, showing natural reactions. Simon's guilt at Whit's death is psychologically realistic, and his inability to express his sorrow to his sister is a natural state of affairs for an adolescent. He is helped by his sister's assurance that he could not be blamed for Whit's death, realizing that one cannot always be saying, "What if . . ." but must accept that there are things beyond one's power to control.

Simon's younger brother shows a normal ignorance of the rites of death when he asks if they had fun at the funeral, his idea being that because they had dressed up it must have been a kind of party. He is unable to comprehend these things, which seems a natural thing for a four-year-old; and his family's inability to explain facts to him at the moment of loss is a true representation of death distractions. The mourning pattern observed in the sister is clearly expressed, with her quietness and lack of spirit continuing over a period of several months, until she is able to face the future again.

This book is a sensitive representation of a family meeting

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tragedy with love and courage. The characters are sympathetic and their interpretations are honest.

Cleaver, Vera and Bill. Grover. Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Co., 1970. Ages 10 - 14.

Grover is about ten years old when his mother, dying of cancer, takes her own life. The story deals with Grover's attempts to cope with this tragedy, and to try to help his father accept the death.

Grover's father reacts with intense emotion, falling into depression and continually railing against the death. He calls the death unfair and seems to feel shame at his wife's death, believing she has somehow failed to live up to the demands her God made upon her.

Grover shows little emotion at all. He resents and is contemptuous of his father's display of grief, feeling that his father is not behaving in the manner his mother would have expected. Grover's reluctance to display emotion is the result of his mother's having told him that he, like her, was tough; Grover tries to behave as he thinks a tough person should. The only emotion he shows is a violent anger at a neighbor who taunts him and criticizes his mother's suicude. His philosophical discussions with his minister and the housekeeper also reveal his inner turmoil.

Grover shows amazing maturity in his understanding of why his mother took her own life, not as an act of despair to avoid the pain of her illness, but as an act of love, to spare her family the pain of seeing the changes the disease would inevitably cause in her. The father's refusal to accept this idea, continuing to insist that the mother's act thwarted the will of God, leads Grover to realize that he cannot help his father any more.

From the viewpoint of the death treatment the book is accurate.

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The reactions of both Grover and his father, while not healthy or normal, are nevertheless common responses to death, and true enough. The reader does realize that these are not good responses. Grover is able to vent his emotions through discussion with his minister, but he still must indulge in violence to relieve his anger and fear; certainly a more open expression of grief would have been far better for him. His eventual realization that his father would have to help himself is a mature attitude.

Although this is a good book, deftly written, with excellent character portrayals, it raises a serious philosophical dilemma. Should a child be forced to deal with the philosophy behind Grover's mother's suicide? Can a child - or even an adult - judge whether or not one must suffer all worldly pain and accept it as God's will, as Grover's father believed; or should one be free to take one's life into one's own hands if it becomes too heavy a burden to bear? This notion might not be acceptable to all religious faiths, but the book does not attempt to pass judgement on the philosophy, and cannot be faulted for that. However, this seems a burdensome thought for a child to cope with, and perhaps has no place in children's literature.

Cunningham, Julia. Wings of the Morning. San Carlos, Calif.: Golden Gate Junior Books, 1971. Ages 6 - 8.

Through a series of photographs, a dead bird is presented as the theme of Wings of the Morning, illustrating the child's brief encounter with the bird and death. The child tries to make it fly, then experiences fear when she realizes she cannot. Her confusion when she sees that the bird is gone soon turns to grief. Security comes to her again in the arms of her father.

The biggest difficulty in considering this book is the child's

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age. The photographs are of a child of age five or six, yet it seems questionable that a child would not have experienced death in some form before that age. Kastenbaum in The Psychology of Death relates an incident of a far younger child (18 months) experiencing his first dead bird. This would seem to imply that most children will have such an encounter before the age depicted in these photographs. Another criticism is the vagueness of the book. The photograph showing the child crying because the bird is gone can be interpreted to read that the bird is simply out of sight of the child (as in fact it is, having fallen out of her view), and not "gone" in the final sense. It is interesting to note that the words "dead" or "die" do not appear in the text at all. Perhaps that fact serves to underscore the lack of appeal of this book. However, the photographs are excellent and convey a real sense of compassion which will be welcome to the reader. Sadly, though, the book is not an outstanding one, lacking the validity and appropriateness one might expect.

De Paola, Tomie. Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs. New York; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1973. Ages 4 - 8.

Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs is a charming tale of love, life and death, told with grace and humor. Nana Upstairs is the ninety-four-year-old great-grandmother, who is usually confined to her bed, but occasionally is able to join the rest of the family, tied to her chair so she won't fall out. Nana Downstairs is the grandmother, always in the kitchen making cookies for the four-year-old hero. One day Nana Upstairs dies, and when the boy goes to visit her home, he is upset to find her bed empty. After explaining that "Dead means that Nana Upstairs won't be here anymore," the child's mother encourages him to speak of his Nana Upstairs, because "She will come back in your memory

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whenever you think about her." She suggests that a falling star is a kiss from Nana Upstairs. The boy then begins to call Nana Downstairs just plain Nana. Years later, when the boy is grown up and Nana dies, he sees two falling stars and comments, "Now you are both Nana Upstairs!"

This is an excellent book which expresses with tenderness and simplicity a small child's encounter with death and loss, and his mother's sensitive means of helping him cope. Her approach to his grief, suggesting talking as a means of bringing back Nana Upstairs is psychologically sound. The lessons he learns about death as a young boy stay with him, and he continues to love and remember the Nanas of his childhood. The concept of a falling star as a kiss from a departed loved one is a unique altogether charming idea.

Fassler, Joan. My Grandpa Died Today. New York: Behavorial Publications, Inc., 1971. Ages 4 - 7.

Grandpa, who has always been a pal to David, tells him that he is growing old and cannot live forever. But he assures the child that he is not afraid to die "because I know that you are not afraid to live." David does not understand this, but desiring to please Grandpa, agrees anyway. When Grandpa dies, sitting in his rocking chair, the boy feels scary. He becomes uneasy when so many grownups come visiting, and finds their crying upsetting. As David returns to his normal activities he finds he misses not being able to share his pleasures with Grandpa. But then he realizes what Grandpa had meant about not being afraid to die; he sees that Grandpa knew the child had so many things to do, and "Grandpa would feel good inside too!"

This is a sensitive portrayal of a loving relstionship between a child and his grandfather. Grandfather's assurance that the boy will

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experience a full happy life, and that Grandpa will be glad for the child, is a sound psychological device, precluding any guilt or anger the child might have after the death, and reinforcing the socially desirable notion that life will go on. The grandfather's acceptance of death is a good attitude to portray to the child, and the boy's reactions are completely realistic for this age level.

The mourning scenes represent the Jewish traditions, with a brief mention of the customs of covering the mirror and drawing the curtains. However, the text is free of any religious connotations, and other customs described, as condolence visits, are common to all cultures, and the book need not be considered exclusively a "Jewish" book.

One small criticism must be made. The drawings of the sadness of the adults mourning Grandpa's death seem far too overdone, even macabre. The expressions remind one of a Greek tragedy mask. Though one should not understate grief, these drawings seem to present grief as a tragedy far beyond what seems desirable. Perhaps the child reader would have a negative reaction to such a heavy touch, if not actually feeling fear, at least not experiencing sympathy.

Furuta, Miyuki. Why, Mother, Why? Translated by Harold P. Wright. Tokyo: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1965. Ages 9 - 12.

Why, Mother, Why? is a beautiful collection of poems in free verse written by a fifth-grade Japanese girl whose mother had died suddenly and unexpectedly. The poems serve as a vent to the child's grief, expressing her sense of loss, her loneliness and confusion, and her desire to emulate her mother and to be the "good girl" she knows her mother would want. She is envious of other children for having mothers, and finds that she misses her mother in every thing she does.

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The poems are touching simple statements of the child's thoughts and emotions, revealing insight into her awareness of death, and her final ability to accept her mother's death. The photographs are excellent, almost poetic in themselves, and contribute to the overall feeling of love and devotion evident in these pages.

Harris, Audrey. Why Did He Die? Minneapolis, Minnesota: Lerner Publications Company, 1985. Ages 5 - 8.

Scott's friend Jim tells him that his Granddad has "passed away", and Scott asks his mother if that means he has died? Scott's mother attempts to answer his questions about death. She explains that the man was old and sick, and his body, like a machine, had worn out; that life is like the seasons with new life in the spring; that the heart is like a motor and sometimes wears out. Death is necessary to prevent the earth from becoming overcrowded, or to prevent too many candles on a birthday cake. Mother assures Scott that she and his father will live for a long, long time, until he is very old. Sometimes even a child dies, but not often. What matters is not how long we live, but how nice to others we are, and the happiness we have to give. Death is not reversible, but we can bring the dead near in our memories. Sadness at loss is painful but natural. Dead people are buried in a cemetery park with God.

The concepts of death presented in this book are acceptable individually, but combined as they are here they become overwhelming. Surely one or two analogies would have been sufficient. The idea that death is needed to control the earth's population seems a rather tasteless idea to present to a small child, and one can only hope that the reference to the birthday candles was intended to be humor!

At first glance mother's statement that Scott's parents will

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live until he is very old might seem lacking in candor, or misleading. But this is an acceptable response to a child's questions about his parent's death; in fact, Dr. Salk recommends it.* Any other reply might cause undue anxiety in the child.

The book is far too belabored and redundant. In addition to the inadequacy of the text, it is written in a pseudo-poetic form that makes for difficult reading, particularly aloud. The phrasing has a rhythmic distortion that makes for unappealing listening. All in all this book is the poorest of the selections, and has only limited value.

*Salk, Lee. What Every Child Would Like His Parents to Know. p. 198.

Lee, Virginia. The Magic Moth. New York: The Seabury Press, 1972. Ages 10 - 12.

This is a remarkable book that represents death in a startling poetic manner. It is a story of a family facing the death of Maryanne, a nine-year-old, told with a superior touch.

The family is aware that Maryanne will not live, and have explained this to the other children. Mark-O, Maryanne's six-year-old brother, does not understand how the family will replace Maryanne as they did his guinea pig when it died. The family gathers to say goodbye to Maryanne; she dies quietly in her sleep, and just at the moment of her death a white moth flies free of its cocoon in her room.

Several excellent attitudes are expressed in this book. The family, while displaying love and sorrow for Maryanne, makes no maudlin sermons about death, and attempts to take up the threads of their lives as usual. The few statements of a religious connotation are general, and the concept of a hereafter is vague and simple - being referred to as a place that is "nice" for Maryanne. Death is described as

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going to sleep, but "the important part that does the dreaming" will be somewhere else; thus a direct sleep-comparison is avoided. The doctor's explanation that some diseases cannot be cured is a valuable point that needs emphasis to the child. The descriptions of the death and the funeral are done with simplicity and empathy, and reflect the cultural attitudes with accuracy.

The book is on firm ground both psychologically and in its reflection of the cultural aspects of death in our society. The author states that she wanted to dispel the false mystery of secrecy associated with the genuine mystery of death, and this book has surely done that, with love and simplicity.

Little, Jean. Home From Far. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965. Ages 10 - 12.

Michael, Jenny's eleven-year-old twin, is killed in an automobile accident. Jenny's reactions to the death form a thread that runs through the entire book and add a great deal to the plot.

Jenny is disturbed because no one in the family speaks of her dead twin, or seems to miss him as she does. She finds it difficult to be no longer one of a pair, but is afraid of revealing her feelings to her mother. When she discovers a box of Michael's clothes and toys in the attic she realizes that her mother has not forgotten him. Mother explains that she was afraid to overdo their grief at the boy's death, as had a relative in her childhood, and assures Jenny that she too has missed Michael very much, and now realizes that it would have been better to talk of him with Jenny. When Jenny confesses that she sometimes feels guilty because she gets happy and busy and forgets to miss him, Mother assures her it is perfectly natural to want to return to a happy life.

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Jenny seems to display greater sophistication in dealing with death than do her parents, sensing it is wrong to never speak of the dead twin, and to put all memories of him out of sight. However, this seems to be a common cultural attitude, and is a true reflection. Her reactions to death are natural, and her adjustment to the loss good. She is able to mourn, yet to accept that life must go on and be as happy as she can make it.

This is an excellent book with an exciting plot and very real characters. Compassionate understanding of a child's grief are shown. The reactions of Jenny and her family are psychologically valid, and blend well into the story.

Miles, Miska. Annie and the Old One. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971. Ages 6 - 9.

This is an outstanding beautiful story of Annie, a six-year-old Navajo girl who cannot accept the approaching death of her beloved Grandmother. Grandmother tells Annie that she is old and will return to Mother Earth by the time the rug now in the loom is complete. Annie misbehaves in school, lets the sheep wander off so her mother won't be able to weave that day, and finally begins to unravel the day's weaving each night. Grandmother, discovering what she has done, explains that men cannot hold back time, but that death and life will go on according to the cycle of time. Thus Annie is able to prepare for her Grandmother's death.

This is a moving beautiful presentation of a death concept. The tenderness and understanding of the Grandmother are well expressed, as is the child's natural reluctance to think of a life without her grandmother. The child's reactions, misbehaving in school and causing trouble for her family, seem natural reactions to a death; authorities

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cite this type of behavoir as common after a death experience, and perhaps Annie is simply demonstrating the same patterns in a reaction to the knowledge of approaching death. The use of Mother Earth and nature's cycle to describe death is sensitive and finely drawn, and the absence of more clear terms, as "dead" or "die", does not appear to be the evasion seen in Wings of the Morning.

Orrel, Doris. The Mulberry Music. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. Ages 10 - 12.

Grandmother's favorite color is mulberry, and her favorite music is Mozart's Jupiter Symphony, which she and granddaughter Libby call "The Mulberry Music." Libby and Grandmother have always been close, sharing their love of music and good times, so when Grandmother becomes ill it is a matter of great concern for Libby. She is continually thwarted in her efforts to reach her ailing grandmother by phone or in a hospital visit, and when she finally is able to see her, she cannot accept that the rasping unseeing woman in the bed is really her grandmother. She runs away to Grandmother's house, and "finds" her in a sheet of music. When Grandmother dies, Libby insists that the funeral not be held in the church, where Grandmother hated the music, but in her own home with The Mulberry Music played on the piano by Libby's mother.

This is a moving story of love and loss. Libby's devotion to her grandmother is beautiful. Her persistence in demanding to see her grandmother seemed to show more wisdom than the adults' desire to shield her from the pain of illness. No attempt is made to conceal the frightening aspect of Grandmother filled with tubes and other medical paraphernalia, and Grandmother's death is not pretty. Death is faced with no fear or anger, but the regret of Grandmother's family and

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friends at her dying is clearly seen. The funeral is a lovely touch, a fitting end to a loving relationship.

The treatment of the story is light, but the images of death and pain are real, and the sociological pictures revealed in the hospital and funeral scenes are accurate.

Shepard, Gordon. The Man Who Gave Himself Away. British Commonwealth: Marlin Quist, 1971. Ages 7 - 10.

This book is a fanciful approach to death. Mr. Pomeroy is an aging eccentric who, seeing that his life is coming to an end, decides to wander around the world giving himself to others who can use him. His moral is that what we leave others during our life remains in those we have helped and loved. Death is welcomed by Mr. Pomeroy: he says he is a happily dying man, and finds it easy to die because he gave himself away. He knows that he will never be really dead because he will continue to live and be remembered in so many things.

The imaginative gifts Mr. Pomeroy makes are whimsical and make for interesting reading. Perhaps the book will not be to every one's taste, but it deserves mention as a unique approach to death.

Smith, Doris Buchanan. A Taste of Blackberries. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1973. Ages 10 - 12.

This is an excellent book of strong emotions well expressed, with great sensitivity to the inarticulateness and sorrow of a ten-year-old child, whose friend Jamie has died of a bee-sting allergy. Told in the first person, the story describes the boy's reactions to his friend's death in a masterful way, and the recollections of the many happy times the boys have spent together reveal a keen insight into the workings of a young boy's mind. This is a fine book which

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manages to be both poignant and exciting.

The boy's reactions to his friend's death are accurate from the psychological point of view. He experiences guilt: "I should have helped him."; denial: "I kept thinking that maybe if I did certain things . . . somehow everything would be all right, it wouldn't be true that Jamie was dead."; he strikes out angrily at the world, destroying a flower at the funeral home. He slowly acknowledges Jamie's death, and demonstrates a fine sensitivity to the needs of others by attempting to comfort the other children. His decision to go to the funeral home is mature, feeling that Jamie would want him to go. Finally he understands that he could best convey the love of his friend and the loss he felt by giving Jamie's mother a gift Jamie himself might have, a basket of blackberries. All are honest reactions to death, appropriate to this age level.

The cultural aspects of death are accurate also, with descriptions of the funeral and the burial kept simple, with no morbidity or sentiment, yet conveying to the reader the very real emotions of those in attendance. The parents' support of the boy is outstanding; there is none of the adult bitterness which is expressed in some other books.

This is an extremely fine book, told with insight, love and humor. It is a good representation of death, and, in addition, is a good story.

Viorst, Judith. The Tenth Good Thing About Barney. New York: Atheneum Publishers, Inc., 1971. Ages 5 - 9.

Barney the cat has died, and the boy is melancholy. He and Mother plan a funeral for the next day, and Mother suggests that the boy think of ten good things to tell about Barney at the funeral. The boy easily thinks of nine good things, but the tenth eludes him. The

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whole family participates in the elaborate burial ceremony. During lunch the boy and his friend argue about where Barney is now, one insisting that he is in the ground, the other claiming he is in heaven. Father very diplomatically comments that we don't really know much about heaven. When they plant seeds over Barney's grave, father explains that soon Barney will change in the ground like the plants do and help the flowers and grass to grow. The boy decides that's a pretty nice thing for a cat, and declares that's the tenth good thing about Barney.

Told with Wiorst's skill and humor, this book can serve as an excellent means of opening discussion about death concepts with a small child. The boy's reactions are realistic, and the parents' honest empathetic responses are outstanding. The suggestion of enumerating the ten good things about the beloved pet opens the door to discussion and memories about the cat, and is a vent for the child's grief, a psychologically commendable device. The finality of death is not avoided, nor is there morbidity or coyness. The father's explanation that even in death Barney will be of benefit to the earth presents a beautiful memory for the child to cherish.

The brief exchange about heaven adds nothing, and might well have been omitted, but at least it is free of bias. The book is to be commended also for its refusal to "pretty up" death, father telling the boy that he is not supposed to like it that the cat has died, but must accept that "that's the way it is."

Wagner, Jane. J. T. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969. Ages 7 - 10.

Sometimes life is hard when death takes away that which we love the most. J.T. is an eight-year-old black boy living in a ghetto of a

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large city. During his explorations he finds an abandoned cat. A bond of affection develops between them, and when the cat is killed by a car, J.T. is heartbroken. His mother and grandmother attempt to share his grief, expressing their own lack of understanding of death, but stressing the need to accept its reality. J. T. learns to accept the death of his pet, and to love another when a neighbor brings a new kitten to him.

This is a simple story, with J.T. revealing a true grief, a normal healthy response. His mother and grandmother are sympathetic and reveal natural adult confusions about death. Once again, the question of the soundness of the idea of immediate replacement of the dead pet is raised, and this book also shows the child's reluctance to abandon his love for his old pet. His acceptance of the new cat is an expression of his awareness that life will go on, and he must accept the loss of something he loved.

Warburg, Sandol. Growing Time. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., Inc., 1969. Ages 7 - 10.

Jamie, about four years of age, and King, his dog, have grown up together, and one day King, now old, dies quietly in his sleep. The book deals with Jamie's reaction to the death, and his family's attempts to respond to his questions and help him cope with the tragedy.

King's absence is felt in every moment of the day. Jamie's uncle tries to ease the pain by saying that King isn't really gone away but simply gone back to the earth as leaves and flowers do. When Jamie expresses disappointment that King hadn't lived until he was all grown up, Granny explains that each must live his own time. Later, when Jamie remembers all the good things he had done with King, and wishes he would come back, Granny explains that only his body has gone away, but

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his spirit will live forever in Jamie's memories. At nightfall, Jamie's parents bring a new puppy, which at first Jamie rejects, but as the night wears on, he reacts to the pup's helplessness and accepts it.

The comparison of Kim's death to the cycle of nature, and his continuing spiritual presence are beautifully written, and present a sensitive portrayal of death to the young child. They would seem to be psychologically acceptable. However, these passages are long and might not hold the attention of the young reader.

The same criticism as of Abbott's The Old Dog, i.e., the immediate replacement of the pet, can apply to this book also. This book does indicate some of the boy's reluctance to accept a new pet, which seems true according to related research.

In spite of a tendency to overstatement, the book is a very good one, treating death with honesty and sympathy.

Zolotow, Charlotte. My Grandson Lew. New York: Harper and Row, 1974. Ages 4 - 7.

Lewis, about four years of age, waking and calling for his mother, asks about Grandpa, whom he has missed. Mother tells Lew that Grandfather has died, and that she did not think Lew remembered him. Then Lew talks of several things he had done with Grandfather, and expresses loneliness without these good times. Mother says that they can share these memories about Grandfather and not feel so lonely.

This is a sensitive presentation of love and death. The mother's suggestion that Grandfather will live on in happy memories helps to soften the boy's loss and serves to present a reasonable concept of death which is psychologically desirable.

The book also reveals insight into the young child's awareness

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of death. As psychologists have found, children do experience a sense of loss at an early age. The fact that Lew had not mentioned his grandfather did not mean that he did not miss him and remember him, as his mother had assumed. This points up the psychologist's contention that a child should be told of the death of a loved one, even when very young, to prevent fears and misconceptions from growing in the child's fertile imagination.

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The following books approach the subject of death as instructional material, and merit mention in this report.

Grollman, Earl A. Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1970. Ages 3 - 8.

This book is designed to be read aloud to the child by the parent, with the aim of promoting dialogue about death. It presents facts and attitudes toward death, and gives a brief description of biological death. Old Testament quotations serve to foster thinking about death. The possibility of the child's harboring feelings of anger or guilt at the dead is openly discussed, and opportunity presented to vent these emotions. Adult lack of understanding is mentioned, with emphasis on the need to accept death even though it is not comprehended. Funerary and burial traditions are described. The book emphasizes that the dead can live in our memory.

Grollman offers a fine opportunity to assist a reluctant parent in sharing with the child his own understanding (or lack of it) and attitudes while allowing the child a vent to his emotions. The Parent's Guide is excellent, and reflects many of the ideas presented in Grollman's earlier book, Explaining Death to Children. This book is now available in paperback edition, and is widely recommended by funeral directors and others concerned with children and death.

Stein, Sarah Bonnett. About Dying. New York: Walker and Co., 1974. Ages 3 - 8.

About Dying is similar in approach to Grollman's Talking About Death, but somehow is not quite as sensitive and effective. It is in picture book format, with a story (in large print) to be read to the child, and, on the same page (in smaller print), a brief explanatory

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portion to be studied by the adult. It is less successful as a story book than as a parental guide.

The story, told in words and photographs, is a true story of the death of a pet bird. It discusses aspects of the bird's biological death and the various reactions and emotions of the children, and illustrates the burial of the bird. The book then introduces a story about Grandpa, who becomes ill and dies. The family's reactions, the funeral, and the cemetery burial are all described. The last few pages point out interesting reactions the children showed, in things not seemingly directly related to death or Grandpa, their eventual acceptance of his death, and their happy recollections of good times with Grandpa.

The adult text suggests the need for open discussion in order to acquaint the child with the facts of death, and also reminds the reader that no book or parent will be able to answer satisfactorily all a child's questions about death, nor help him to avoid all misunderstandings about death. It alerts the parent to ideas and concepts the child may have, and assists in countering many of his misconceptions, or any false notions society's attitudes may impose. A strong point of the book is its discussion of ways in which the child's emotions toward death may be revealed, in areas of conduct that do not seem related to death. The concepts expressed are psychologically sound, and described in a simple straight-forward manner.

This is a unique approach to the problems of coping with death and the small child. It forces one to think of and discuss even some of the less pleasant facts of death (this is the only book which refers to the fact that dead things smell bad), and its comments are more related to the deeper psychological significance of death. This is a valuable point, though some of the text may be a bit blunt for some

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tastes. It is, nevertheless, a worthwhile addition to books on death and the young child.

Zim, Herbert S. and Bleeker, Sonia. Life and Death. New York: William Morrownand Co., 1970. Ages 8 - 12.

This book presents the scientific view of death. It describes the physical facts of death in considerable detail, with explanations of the aging process, clinical death, autopsy, and other aspects of biological death. Customs of embalming and burial in several cultures are described.

This is a thoroughly dispassionate look at death, though it is sensitive, and never maudlin or morbid. Perhaps some would prefer that a child learn about death in this emotion-free, clinical way, and the book is excellent in that context. However, those desiring philosophy or emotion will be disappointed in this text.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

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It is clear that the ability to face and discuss life's greatest mystery is necessitated by the world in which we live, and just as this need exists, there is a resulting need to share society's concerns with the child. It is fortunate that the trend to realism in children's literature has made this possible. Books have always reflected the goals and preoccupations of an age, and have traditionally served to enlighten the child. Death-related literature can be valuable to the child when it acknowledges that the young child's views of death differ from the adult's, and that this literature must approach the subject on the child's own level.

In general, the books reviewed are of outstanding value. The style of most is sensitive and demonstrates to a high degree those values of art and integrity particularly essential to such a difficult theme. Death is presented honestly, with no maudlin sentiment, yet free from grimness or morbidity.

In evaluating the books for the primary age level (up to eight years of age), one glaring fact presented itself. These books all deal either with animal deaths or with the death of an elderly grandparent. None of the stories introduces the more traumatic events of parent or sibling deaths, or even that of another child, even though a child may well encounter these deaths in his life, and would find a book of that nature helpful to him. However, the absence of these themes does not necessarily imply that children's authors have been reluctant to discuss these more profound deaths with the young child. In all fairness, one must recognize that most of these books appeared only during the last three years - this is still a fledgling area of children's liter-

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ature. Therefore, one can hope, or perhaps assume, that these more demanding death events will be dealt with in the future.

The animal and grandparent deaths are all treated gently, with no violence, no illness or pain. This at first glance may appear to be too timid an approach, and not realistic enough. After all, there often is pain and violence in death, so why spare the child? But since the aim of this literature is to promote greater understanding and acceptance of death for the child, the presence of pain or violence might create a fear or abhorrence of death, and defeat the purpose of the story. Therefore, this treatment must be judged as completely valid. In the books geared to the older child death does involve pain and violence, and the themes of parent, sibling, and child deaths do appear; but by this age the child's concepts of death are developed to the degree that psychologically he is able to deal with the violent or more traumatic death events, and would not associate violence or pain with all deaths, as a younger child might.

Another factor about the literature that merits comment is the presentation of the deaths of the grandparents. Psychological studies reveal that often death is faced with fear or anger, yet all of the books characterized the grandparents' deaths as welcome and accepted. One might again criticize this approach for its timidity. However, once again one must weigh truth against the purported requirement of the story - to inculcate knowledge and acceptance of death as a part of life. To have death presented as an enemy or as something to be denied or feared would surely convey an undesirable connotation to the child. Therefore, the conclusion must be reached that this too is a valid literary device; though not absolutely factual, it would seem to be a more desirable interpretation of death.

The stories for the intermediate age group (ages nine to twelve)

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are less easily categorized. These deal with all manner of deaths: parent, sibling, and friend, as well as animal and grandparent. The death theme is sometimes presented as a thread running through the entire story line, but in many books the entire plot revolves around the death. Both treatments are effective and acceptable, both as good literature and as vehicles for dealing with the death concepts.

An interesting fact revealed in an overview of this collection of books is that most of the stories revolve around a boy hero, with only a few illustrating a girl as the central character. Of the twenty-two books reviewed, only five clearly depict a female in the role of the main character. This is particularly true of the primary group, where only one book, The Wings of the Morning, illustrates a girl in the text. One can only speculate at the reason for this, if any does indeed exist. Perhaps it is just coincidence, but the fact that the male in our society is expected to be "tough" and to remain free of emotion in crisis may be an explanation. The authors may be attempting to refute this attitude, emphasizing that the male child ought to be granted the luxury of tears and grief, just as his female counterpart.

None of the stories introduces death concepts that society may believe to be unwholesome or inappropriate, even though these concepts may be true reflections of the child's images of death, as determined in the psychological studies. For instance, there is no personification of death as a macabre force or a skeletal figure, although this is the image of death common to the five- to nine-year old. Of course, the specter of death as the Grim Reaper is an image today's society does not support, and the literature recognizes this fact. By the same token, no book denies the finality of death, but seeks instead to present death as final, universal, and inevitable. On the whole, little reference is made to a theory of eternal life, though occasionally a

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heaven or God is mentioned, but in a manner that avoids religious bias or distortion. A book which presents any kind of life-death philosophy emphasizes memories as a legacy of death, and there is no promise of bliss or reward, nor a threat of eternal punishment held out to the child. Deaths are depicted with realism, avoiding lachrymose death-bed scenes, and if an overly emotional reaction to death does occur, the reader clearly understands that this is considered undesirable behavoir.

Attitudes of fear of death are avoided. The books picture death as a fact of life to be accepted even though not necessarily fully understood. No attempt is made to underestimate the sorrow of loss, however, nor is grief characterized as bad taste. In fact, grief is presented as healthy and totally acceptable, although excess emotion is to be avoided. Adult euphemisms that often complicate death awareness, such as "gone to sleep" or "gone on a journey" do not appear.

The deaths in these books present various concepts and can be expected to inculcate certain values to the reader. The books reinforce those social attitudes deemed desirable in our culture - self control, acceptance of approaching death, and lack of fear. The threatening image of death known to the Puritans is absent, and the maudlin sentiment of the last century is avoided. As a whole, the books treat death commendably, and one can refer these to the child reader with confidence that they are a wholesome valid view of death, as well as good literature. It is hoped that those books which deal with death can be helpful to the child, as preparation, as therapy, or as a supportive aid, useful in promoting understanding and acceptance of "Death as a Fact of Life."

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